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Violence May Break Out in Ecuador Over the Cuban Issue

Chiriboga told Ambassador Bernbaum in early February that he was greatly concerned over the Ecuadorean political situation, and predicted another postponement of the eleventh Inter-American Conference now set for Quito on 24 May. He noted President Velasco's desire for closer relations with Cuba, his friendship for Araujo, and his refusal to take action against Communist or Cuban activities in Ecuador.

The potential for violence over the Cuban issue was indicated recently by Communist-backed student unrest in both Quito and Guayaquil which caused demonstrations against Chiriboga and the incumbent minister of government. The Castro regime has cultivated relations with Velasco, particularly by expressing support for Ecuador in its long-standing boundary dispute with Peru.

Chiriboga also stated to an American official on 28 February that a military coup was being planned in Guayaquil. Such an attempt has been considered by a group of about 50 high-ranking officers, under the leadership of the former army commander, who were retired soon after Velasco was inaugurated last September. As minister of government, Araujo accused these officials of treason--a move which touched off a political controversy and helped precipitate his resignation. Although Velasco has a substantial following among the officer corps, he might alienate it if he reappoints Araujo to a top government position and follows a pro-Castro, pro-Soviet policy. Chiriboga said he had information that at a cabinet meeting last Saturday Velasco agreed to repudiate Araujo and threaten him with jail if he continued his activities; but Chiriboga also said he was certain Velasco will not follow through on this.

Araujo recently spent about three weeks in Cuba, and he has reportedly maintained close contact with the Cuban Embassy in Quito. An advocate of close relations with the bloc, he possibly contacted one or more bloc missions while in Havana.

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